

AMERICAN PUBLIC OPINION ABOUT VIETNAM

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In this review of public opinion about the war in Vietnam, we conclude that more probing into the psychological supports for war is vitally important. The surveys, which we summarize in this paper, do provide an understanding of the structure and distribution of public opinion on the war in Vietnam. The closed-ended questions asked in the typical surveys supply only the most indirect information on why people feel the way they do about the war. We could not locate any surveys utilizing a series of open-ended questions, a valuable way of probing into the structure of attitudes. The answer to "why" is necessary in order to both understand public attitudes towards war and the dynamics of possible changes in public opinion.

We first review what is probably the most comprehensive of these survey studies and the conclusions it reached. We then proceed to examine some general trend data on Vietnam attitudes from other survey organizations. Next, we pay special attention to the important college-educated segment of the population. We conclude with some speculations about the psychological reasons for public attitudes about the war.

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I. The Verba et al Study

The most authoritative study on public attitudes toward the Vietnam war was conducted by Sidney Verba and associates^{1/} mainly at Stanford University. Field work and interviewing was done by the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago in the early spring of 1966. A national probability sample of about 1500 adults, a usual size for most surveys done by academic institutions, took part in the survey.

The most interesting conclusion of this intensive survey, for our purposes, was the complex and amorphous nature of public attitudes about the war. A person might endorse a belligerent position on one aspect of the war, while on the next aspect, a very neutral or pacifistic position.^{2/} In other words the correlations between the items were not high enough to clearly separate the public into the two camps of hawks and doves. That public attitudes fail to follow what we in academia consider "rational" criteria in forming opinions about political issues merely reaffirms previous research perspectives about public attitudes.^{3/}

^{1/} S. Verba et al., "Public Opinion and the War in Vietnam", American Political Science Review, June 1967, pp. 317-333. This study is often referred to as "Stanford Poll".

^{2/} The correlation between an escalation scale and a deescalation scale (each composed of eight separate questions) was $-.37$, far below what one would expect for scales presumably measuring different ends of the same continuum.

^{3/} An article in a recent issue of the Saturday Evening Post vividly illustrated this orientation in describing a recent survey of a "typical community" on what people thought about the upcoming elections. An interview with one young lady brought out the fact that she intended to support George Wallace for the presidency--unless Bobby Kennedy decided to run in which case she would switch her support to him. Such a finding becomes less surprising when one examines reasons people have given for their vote over the years. Thus people have told interviewers from the Survey Research Center that they voted for Eisenhower because he was the first president of the U.S. who went to church, or that they didn't like Nixon because of his eyes (especially his left one) or because he was a foreigner. For several further examples see Converse, P., "The Ideological Character of Mass Participation in American Business" in Govert Van den Bosch (ed.), Political Issues and Business in 1964, Ann Arbor, Michigan: Foundation for Research on Human Behavior, 1964, pp. 11-19.

Another finding of interest from the Verba et al study was the lack of attitudinal differences between social status categories. As expected, level of information increased with more educational background, but respondents' attitudes toward the war differed little according to educational level. This finding refutes the common assumption that the college segment of the population is the vocal anti-war group in the country. (We will have more to say about this later.) Indeed, the Verba et al study found those most informed (and educated) were slightly more likely to support escalation as well as slightly more consistent than those with less accurate knowledge about the war.^{4/} In short, the Verba study showed that the structure of attitudes on the Vietnam war was quite similar throughout all strata of society and few of the traditional background factors could explain such diversity. The complexity of the war is thus reflected in a complex "public opinion".

A nationwide Harris survey conducted for Newsweek, on the other hand, characterized certain types of respondents as holding positions on the war as shown in Table 1. Many of these relationships were noted by Verba et al., but these authors did not consider them as well defined as Table 1 would suggest.

The strongest background variable associated with differences in war attitudes discovered by Verba et al. (a difference also noted by Harris in Table 1) was race. The black respondents were significantly more opposed to escalation and were more willing to support deescalation than whites. Among possible explanations for the dovish tendency among blacks, the most obvious one--a feeling of alienation from white society and its wars--is indirectly supported

^{4/} Furthermore that small subset of persons in the Verba et al. sample who volunteered their opinions through letters--the "articulate public"--was virtually no different in their attitudes from the rest of the general public. In addition the authors found the "letter writers are not more likely to take extreme positions".

TABLE 2: COMPARISON OF THE POPULARITY OF VIETNAM
POLICY ALTERNATIVES ACROSS 11 COUNTRIES

	<u>Begin to Withdraw</u>	<u>Carry on Present Level</u>	<u>Increase Attacks</u>	<u>No Opinion</u>	
Finland	81	4	5	10	= 100%
Sweden	79	10	4	7	= 100%
Brazil	76	5	5	14	= 100%
France	72	8	5	15	= 100%
India	66	4	8	22	= 100%
Uruguay	62	10	5	23	= 100%
West Germany	58	11	<u>14</u>	17	= 100%
Argentina	57	6	6	31	= 100%
England	45	15	<u>15</u>	25	= 100%
Canada	41	16	23	20	= 100%
Australia	<u>29</u>	18	<u>37</u>	16	= 100%
United States	31	10	53 ?	6	= 100%

by findings from studies of black residents of areas in which civil disorders have taken place. In a survey administered in Detroit^{5/} and later in Newark^{6/} after the riots of 1967, respondents were asked whether they personally felt this country was worth fighting for in the event the United States became involved in a major world war. Although the question did not mention Vietnam, it is worth noting that 40% of those involved in rioting in Detroit and over 50% of those in Newark felt that the country was not worth fighting for.^{7/}

Verba et al. dismissed the notion that white-black differences, which parallel social status differences, were in fact attributable to social class. Their main argument was the finding that war attitudes and race were even more strongly related when controls were made for level of information.

The other main correlate of war attitudes--sex--was not as strongly associated as race with attitudes. The finding that women are less pro-war (also noted in Table 1) is consistent with expectations related to women's role in society, and with findings from a great body of survey data which reveal sex differences in aggressive or belligerent attitudes toward political issues.

^{5/}Meyer, P., A Survey of Attitudes of Detroit Negroes after the Riot of 1967, Detroit: The Detroit Free Press, 1967. (Also cited in the Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders.)

^{6/}Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, New York: Bantam Books, 1968, p. 178.

^{7/}Comments such as, "I am not a true citizen, so why should I?" and "My husband came back from Vietnam and nothing has changed" illustrate some of the reasoning behind these responses. Among a sample of respondents who did not participate in the rioting, 15% in Detroit and 30% in Newark also felt the country was not worth fighting for in the event of war. These attitudes were in sharp contrast with the responses of "counter-rioters"--those who attempted to persuade rioters to "cool it". This group, which the Kerner Commission Report portrayed as active supporters of existing social institutions, were far less willing to be non-supportive and only 3% of these citizens with a stake in their community would fail to fight for their country in the event of war. To anticipate differences discussed later, (see p.10) only 18% of a group of University of Michigan students, 3% of teachers enrolled in a University of Michigan extension service course in Public Opinion and 1% of a group of students at Adrian College said that the country was not worth fighting for.

Verba and certain of his associates have completed two further surveys since the one reported here, but neither is close to the scope of this study. One of these was conducted in February 1967, the other in February 1968.^{8/} Only the sketchiest of information is currently available from the two surveys. The data suggest a hardening of opinion against a coalition government and greater desire for military escalation between 1966 and 1967. The 1968 survey shows little further hardening of opinion but does indicate surprisingly (in view of civil disturbances) that Americans continue to consider Vietnam, far and away, the most serious problem facing the U.S.^{9/} As before, Negroes and women show up most opposed to war policies but differences by social status and age also seem more visible, with those of higher status and middle age most in favor of war policies.

While these latter surveys promise some time perspective on the study of war attitudes, there are better sources for trend data. Unfortunately, these sources provide very little understanding of why attitudes have changed over time.

II. Trends in Support for the War

The most complete set of trend data is available from the Gallup Poll. Two questions have been asked frequently enough to chart how public reaction has varied over time. These questions are:

^{8/} This latter survey is one of five that Verba along with Richard Brody and Jerome Laulicht plan to carry out during this election year repeating the same questions on candidates and parties vis-a-vis Vietnam. The major intent of these studies is to clearly indicate how public opinion on foreign policy becomes related to voting behavior.

^{9/} In early May, 1968, after the murder of Rev. Martin Luther King, and the start of negotiations, Gallup found that 42% of the respondents cited Vietnam as "the most important problem facing the nation today", while 25% found race relations, and 15% cited crime and lawlessness as the major problem. (New York Times, May 26, 1968.) In terms of other priorities, there has been a shift which has seen concern about "cost-of-living" reduced and concern for race relations increased since 1966.

- 1) Do you approve or disapprove of the way President Johnson is handling the situation in Vietnam?
- 2) In view of the developments since we entered the fighting in Vietnam, do you think the U.S. made a mistake sending troops to fight in Vietnam?

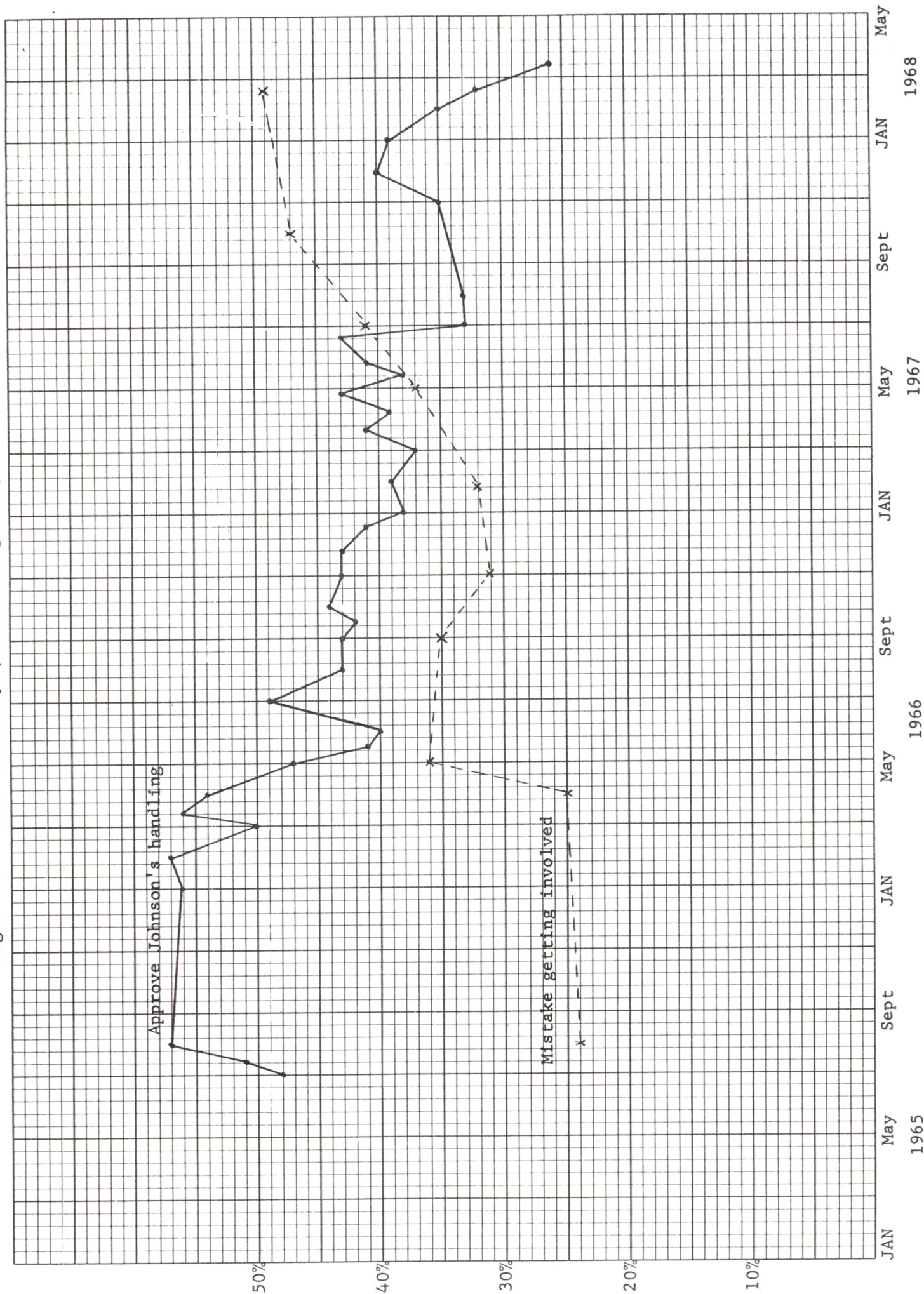
Public response to these two questions is graphed in Figure 1 and shows a definite (although irregular) decrease in percentages approving of Johnson's policy over the last three years, while the percentage feeling the U.S. made a mistake in getting involved in Vietnam has doubled. Gallup's figure on approval of Johnson's job as President declines at much the same tempo as his ratings on Vietnam. It also appears that approval ratings go up as long as Johnson does something, whether it be more militaristic or more pacifistic.

Gallup, however, has paid little subsequent attention to the important question of why people disapprove of Johnson policies. Only twice when the "approve-disapprove" question was asked, did Gallup follow with an open-ended question asking why people said they disapproved. The reasons given had only slightly more a dovish than a hawkish ring to them, so that disapproval of Johnson's policy is just about as likely to be based on feelings that his policy was "too soft" as "too hard".^{10/} Undoubtedly, the same sort of split opinion underlies positive response to the question asking whether it was a mistake getting involved in the war.

Two other survey questions asked by Gallup about Vietnam merit attention. In one 1967 survey, Gallup asked his respondents if they had a clear idea of

^{10/} Brody reports the following interesting finding in relation to the standard Gallup question about approval or disapproval of President Johnson's handling of Vietnam. In the 1966 Verba et al. study, those who disapproved of Johnson's policies favored de-escalation policies over escalation policies. In 1967, the disapprovers (now 50% more numerous than in 1966) avored our bombing policy, although still tending to be opposed to more troops and still more in favor of a coalition government than approvers. In at least one sense, then, the mounting disapproval of Johnson's policies appeared not motivated by pacifistic motives. See R. Brody "Vietnam and the 1968 Election: A Preview", Trans-action (in press for September 1968).

Figure 1: Trends on Gallup Questions Regarding Vietnam



why the U.S. was fighting in Vietnam. Only about half of the population said that they had.^{11/} The majority of those gave a general "stopping Communism" response with little apparent thought to the problems peculiar to Vietnam itself. Only a quarter referred to the conflict specifically in terms of problems in Vietnam.

Later in 1967, Gallup conducted an 11 nation comparison of a single policy question about Vietnam:^{12/}

"Just from what you have hear or read, which of the statements (LISTED ON CARD) comes closest to the way you, yourself, feel about the war in Vietnam.

- A. The U.S. should begin to withdraw its troops
- B. The U.S. should carry on its present level of fighting
- C. The U.S. should increase the strength of its attacks against North Vietnam?"

The responses are compared in Table 2 and show the Scandinavian people by far the most opposed to the war. The greatest support for increasing the war, not surprisingly, comes from U.S. citizens, although Australians were less in favor of a withdrawal of troops than were Americans.

We have also examined some limited data on Vietnam attitudes collected by the Survey Research Center at the University of Michigan. Unfortunately, we have only three^{13/} national readings of a single SRC question dealing with Vietnam policy. This question is very similar to that charted in Table 2:

^{11/} Gallup Opinion Index, Princeton, New Jersey: Gallup International, Inc., Report 25, July 1967. At the height of World War II, 83% had a clear idea of what we were fighting for.

^{12/} Gallup Opinion Index, Princeton, New Jersey: Gallup International, Inc., Report 29, November 1967.

^{13/} The question in 1964 and 1966 were asked as part of the election studies. In 1967, the question was part of a study of economic behavior.

TABLE 1: DIFFERENCES IN BACKGROUND CHARACTERISTICS OF
RESPONDENTS WITH VARIOUS ORIENTATIONS TOWARD THE VIETNAM WAR

<u>Category</u>	<u>Agrees with:</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Percentage in June, 1967</u>
Extreme Hawk	All out military effort	Lives in West Suburban resident Voted for Barry Goldwater	18%
Moderate Hawk	Administration's policy, but wants escalation to force negotiations	Lives in South People over 50 Income under \$5000	40%
Moderate Dove	Administration's policy, but wants reduction in escalation to encourage negotiations	Lives in East People under 35 Jews	36%
Extreme Doves	Unconditional halt to bombing and withdrawal of American troops from South Vietnam	Negroes The poor Women City residents	6%

Source: Louis Harris as reported in Newsweek, July 10, 1967.

"Which of the following do you think we should do now in Vietnam.

1. Pull out of Vietnam entirely
2. Keep our soldiers in Vietnam but try to end the fighting
3. Take a stronger stand even if it means invading North Vietnam."

Percentages of the population endorsing each of these alternatives between 1964 and 1967 are listed in the left hand columns in Table 3. In both the Gallup and the SRC question, the most hawkish stand remains the most popular.^{14/} In 1966 nearly four times as many people endorsed the "stronger stand" as the "pull out" proposition in the SRC poll. While we expected increased support for the pull out proposition in 1967 as a result of reported increased elite opposition to the war, such a shift was hardly noticeable in the general public.^{15/}

An interesting policy dilemma arises if we must draw conclusions from survey data--an often dangerous occupation. We see the American public as strongly favoring escalation and victory, yet the official policy is leaning towards a negotiated settlement. There are no polls to date which indicate public reaction to negotiations, but we would expect the public to be mis-trustful and cynical--yet hopeful--about the outcome. The policy dilemma, therefore, revolves about the public's willingness to accept a Korea-type settlement. In Table 3 we find that public opinion on Korea before negotiations were similar to those on Vietnam before negotiation. We all recall that Americans managed to

^{14/} With a more extreme dove position in the SRC question than in the Gallup question, it is seen that the middle status quo position becomes the most popular in constrast to its extreme unpopularity among the three alternatives offered by Gallup.

^{15/} Harris found that 43% of his respondents favored ground invasion of North Vietnam (Newsweek, July 10, 1967). Support for invasion decreased only slightly to 44% (New York Times, March 26, 1968) after more than a year of opposition to the war by some leading clergy, politicians, business and military men.

TABLE 3: DISTRIBUTION OF OPINIONS ABOUT VIETNAM (AND KOREA)
USING SURVEY RESEARCH CENTER QUESTION

	National Samples				University of Michigan Psychology Students		Adrian College Students
	Nov 1964	Nov 1966	Nov 1967	Korea (Nov 1952)	Sept 1967	Jan 1968	March 1968
Pull out	11%	10%	13%	(11%)	47%	41%	7%
Keep soldiers there	30	39	34	(45)	38	50	47
Take stronger stand	39	39	42	(39)	15	9	46
Other	*	2	1	(*)	--	--	--
Don't know	<u>20</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>(5)</u>	<u>--</u>	<u>--</u>	<u>--</u>
	100%	100%	100%	(100%)	100%	100%	100%

accept a settlement in Korea without great resentment.^{16/} We suspect that there are clues in the original Verba et al. survey which indicate that the public is willing to accept a Korea type settlement. In 1966, 88% were willing to negotiate directly with the Vietcong--a remarkably strong showing for a nation which views itself as more hawk than dove. The study concluded^{17/} that, "Our data suggested a higher permissiveness for reduction of the war but evidence from other polls since then suggests that the President's support increases no matter what he does--increase the war or talk of negotiations--as long as he does something."^{18/} It is entirely possible that strong support for military escalation does not include increased use of U.S. troops in Vietnam. The President could make a negotiated settlement sound like a victory. If sentiment is found to run against further loss of U.S. boys--he could claim to have obtained our policy objective and further loss of life is no longer necessary. While public acceptance of negotiations may be highly conditional, indications are that the public will follow the President's lead and endorse nearly any agreement given his approval.

^{16/} We would also expect future polls to indicate an increasing acceptance of a Korean type settlement. In a recent "survey" (actually, a series of interviews), done by the National Staff of the U.S. News and World Report, there were both unfavorable and favorable comparisons with Korea. According to a Chicago salesman, "The peace overture will be a farce. I just know nothing is going to happen. At the time of Korean peace talks, we were slaughtered." But a Baltimore restaurant manager was more optimistic, "I am very happy about Hanoi's offer to talk, I am hopeful. Even if all we get out of it is a standoff like Korea, it will be better than we have now." This information was given in the article "At Grass Roots: A Nationwide Survey", U.S. News and World Report, May 13, 1968, p.41.

^{17/} Verba, 1967, op. cit. p.333.

^{18/} The latest Gallup poll we have available, shows that 64% approved, 26% disapproved and 10% had no opinion of the President's March 31 "decision to stop bombing North Vietnam" ("How Young People Will Vote", U.S. News and World Report, April 29, 1968, pp.32-33).

III. Attitudes of College Graduates and College Students

Those familiar with survey or poll data realize that large gaps exist in the information structure of large majorities of the population. In 1964, for example, less than half of the population were aware that there were two Chinese governments, one communist on the Mainland and the other non-communist on Taiwan.^{19/} This leads one to question the meaningfulness of survey results from mass populations on foreign affairs attitudes. Some might even argue that a high level of education and training is required before a person can best understand the complexities and subtleties of foreign policy. For this reason, we devote special attention to the most-educated 10% of our population.

How is it possible for the best-educated segment of the population to be most in favor of the war when its members constantly embody the most vocal anti-war sentiment encountered in the mass media? To explain such a paradox, the college population in the United States could be differentiated according to two characteristics: (1) the "quality" of the school which the person attends, and (2) the person's academic field of interest.

(1) Survey analysts are becoming more aware of the differences between individuals from different kinds of institutions of high learning. Wilensky found that exposure to high brow material in the mass media was far more dependent on the "quality" of the college attended than on college attendance per se.^{20/} In similar fashion, Converse found that while 9% of college graduates from institutions rated A or B by the American Association of University Professors

^{19/} See J. Robinson, Public Information about World Affairs, Ann Arbor, Michigan: Survey Research Center, 1967.

^{20/} Wilensky, H. "Mass Society and Mass Culture: Independence or Interdependence", American Sociological Review, 1964, 29, pp.173-197.

were happy to see Goldwater nominated in 1964, 57% of those who graduated from colleges rated E, F, or G were enthusiastic for Goldwater.^{21/} In both instances ideas and perceptions that are fashionable among graduates of the leading "prestige" educational institutions may be completely alien to the bulk of college graduates in this country.

With this orientation, it is less surprising that Armor et al. found 60% of faculty members of large public universities in the Boston area opposed to the war in Vietnam vs. 45% of faculty members at large private universities vs. 33% at small private colleges vs. 17% at Catholic universities.^{22/} Parallel differences can be found in the right hand columns of Table 3, where close to half of the students in an advanced undergraduate social psychology class at the University of Michigan endorse the withdraw policy on the SRC question as opposed to only 7% of an "opportunity sample" of students at Adrian College, a small school located about 40 miles south of Ann Arbor. Neither the sample at Michigan or at Adrian comes close to being a definitive representation of students at either school, but the dramatic differences are in line with expectations from the previous discussion. They are also in line with other polls of college students which report more hawkish than dovish sentiment on college campuses. Thus that vocal minority--probably the most articulate segment of today's university students--most opposed to Vietnam has probably created the impression that the majority of college students share their feelings.

(2) In terms of a person's academic field of interest, the differences between schools appear not as pronounced as those that exist between alma maters.

^{21/}Converse, P., "Social Cleavages in the 1964 Election", paper read at the Annual Meetings of the American Sociological Association in Chicago, August, 1965.

^{22/}Armor, J. et al., "Professors Attitudes toward the Vietnam War", Public Opinion Quarterly, 1967, XXXI, pp.159-175.

Armor et al, for example, find 49% of those in the humanities faculty opposed to the war vs. 45% of social scientists and 36% of natural scientists.^{23/} Somewhat larger, but still moderate, differences were found between faculty members in the humanities, social sciences and natural sciences by Schuman and Laumann in a Vietnam survey at the University of Michigan.^{24/}

It would not be surprising to find parallel divisions of opinion between students majoring in these fields or between individuals employed in "people-oriented" professions (e.g., social workers, school teachers, clergymen) and those in "object-oriented" professions (e.g., engineering, business, physics, astronomy). To our knowledge, no study of Vietnam attitudes has documented the effects of such sources of variance to date. This only illustrates one aspect of the huge research gap that remains about attitudes toward the Vietnam war--namely the reason why people hold the attitudes that they do.

IV. Psychological Orientation towards War--A Research Gap

In attempting to explain attitudes regarding the war, we are hampered by lack of in-depth descriptive probes into the public's cognitive orientations toward organized violence. In spite of increasing inquiry and speculation about the psychological basis of war,^{25/} we have few theories and fewer empirical studies of public support for any war--let alone the war in Vietnam.

In urging more in-depth analysis, we realize that this is a costly, time-consuming, and complex task. It took several years of research by three senior

^{23/} Armor et al., op. cit.

^{24/} Schuman, H. and Laumann, E., "Do Most Professors Support the War?", Transaction, November, 1967, pp.32-35. At Michigan, it was the social scientists who most opposed the war, then humanists, with natural scientists again most in favor of current or stronger war policies.

^{25/} An excellent summary of this literature appears in Jerome D. Frank, Sanity and Survival: Psychological Aspects of War and Peace, New York: Vintage Books, 1968.

authors, four well-qualified associates, and several graduate students to produce Opinions and Personality,^{26/} an in-depth study of the attitudes of ten Boston males towards Russia. This study takes nearly three hundred pages to describe the opinions of these ten men toward the single object of Russia, an object about which these men cared little. The author's findings caution against simplistic interpretations of public attitudes. They found little in the way of either "unalloyed hostile orientation" toward Russia or in the way of abstract thinking about Russia. Thus individuals arrived at similar policy orientations from vastly different motivational bases. The study concludes that opinions are a complex product of "reality demands, social demands, and inner psychological demands". These three demands are closely interdependent so that a change dictated by reality demands, for example, will not ensure that the person's opinion will change accordingly. The complex of determinants which shape an individual's opinion cannot be easily discovered, nor may they be simply assumed as we are so often forced to do when interpreting public opinion polls.

The Verba et al. study concludes that policy preference in terms of the war in Vietnam may be patterned by the respondent's attitude to the war itself. Instead of drawing clues about their attitudes from social sources, people are tending to think, react and respond directly to the object itself--the war in Vietnam.^{27/} If attitudes regarding the war are specific and situational, as Verba and his colleagues suggest, then survey research on the war may not provide many clues to a basic understanding of the depth of support for aggression in our society. Along these lines, study into the complexities of individual

^{26/} M. Brewster Smith, Jerome S. Bruner, Robert W. White, Opinions and Personality, New York: John Wiley, 1956.

^{27/} Verba, et al., op. cit., p.331.

attitudes would be most useful. Again underscored is the desirability of in-depth and open-ended interviews as a fruitful way of developing working hypotheses on attitudes concerning war.

Because there has been no further significant patterning of opinions by social status (with the exception of race) since the Verba et al study, it is reasonable to conclude that further surveys using the conventional demographic approach will not add much more to our understanding of the basic structure of opinion regarding the war. We must probe deeper into the process of attitude formation than is possible in the usual national survey. We now need to know: what justifications people give for the policy stands that they take,^{28/}

^{28/} We suggest that two justifications dominate grass roots public acceptance of the war:

1. Containment of Communism -- in which Communism is seen as an immoral force and essentially evil. Any differences between types and aims of Communist governments are neither relevant nor important. Any action to stop Communism is seen as justified.
2. Meeting our Commitments -- which has elements of both inner-directedness and other-directedness. A major inner-directed theme is: the feeling that if America gets involved in a conflict, we ought to win, combined with an outlook that our sacrifices of men and money shall not have been for nought. Two other-directed elements can also be isolated: America's obligation to help those we have promised to help, and the maintenance of our international prestige as a defender of freedom.

To be sure, citizens vary widely in the degree to which they knowingly accept these reasons or consciously advance them as justification for the war. But we would not be surprised to find them emerging as central factors when people are asked to explain their Vietnam policy stands. Our remarks should not be construed as evidence that justifications against the war are by nature superior to arguments for the war. Moreover, we would be interested in finding that war justifications would be considerably more sophisticated than indicated in this and the following footnote.

what factors work to condone the systematic brutality of modern warfare,^{29/}
what information is sought in order to decide on support or opposition to the
war,^{30/} how internal contradictions are compartmentalized or rationalized,^{31/}
and many further questions along this line of inquiry.

^{29/} In our estimate, Ralph White has done a very comprehensive job in this direction. His monograph constitutes a suitable hypothetical framework to begin research into the possible distortions which occur within an individual's perception of the world. White identifies seven misperceptions which may support aggression. These misperceptions are:

1. The diabolical enemy-image - 'they are evil'
2. The moral self-image - 'we are good'
3. The virile self-image - 'we are also strong'
4. Military overconfidence
5. Absence of empathy
6. Selective inattention
7. Conflicting territorial self-images

Ralph K. White, "Misperception and the Vietnam War," The Journal of Social Issues, July 1966, 22, entire issue.

^{30/} In gaming simulations, we are beginning to discover what type of information is sought by players for decision making in a conflict situation. In a review of these experiments, it was found that those individuals who were inclined to think in abstractions tended to search for information along all categories of a problem. Those individuals who were more concrete tended to explore one category in great depth and detail. Under conditions of stress, decision making followed a normal curve: (1) at low levels of stress and information -- decisions are relatively simplistic; (2) at "optimal" levels -- (a) abstract persons make more complex decisions with reference to past decisions, (b) concrete persons make relatively simple decisions in spite of increased information, and (3) at "super-optimal" levels of stress and under conditions of information overload -- all players tend to make simple decisions, with concrete individuals actually being more effective at filtering out bits of information which the abstract individual tries (unsuccessfully) to relate to his complex decision making pattern. These findings relate to decision making in conflict situations, but experiments could be adopted to discover the information patterns behind both "grass roots" and "elite" decision making in terms of foreign policy. See Schroder, H. M., Driver, M. J. and Streufert, S., Human Information Processing, New York: Holt, Reinhart and Winston, 1967.

^{31/} Some processes relevant in this context are presented in D. Katz and E. Stotland "A Preliminary Statement of a Theory of Attitudes" in S. Koch (ed.) Psychology: A Study of a Science, vol. 3, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1959

A comparison of the conclusions reached in the Verba et al survey in 1966, the Harris poll of 1967, and recent reaction to the situation in Vietnam indicates an interesting trend as shown in Table 4. The nation has few illusions about the technical nature (if not the justifications) of the war, but accepts it as a necessary evil which may be with us for a long time. As a nation, we have shown ourselves to be willing to follow the lead of three Presidents in pursuing our Vietnam policy and to react favorably to any positive action. The present dissatisfaction with the war, its overwhelming unpopularity, should not be interpreted as a rejection of war in general or of our foreign policy.

If current negotiations are successful, it will be interesting to see how the public rationalizes the heavy price our country has paid for what will be an undistinguished if not negative settlement. Even more interesting will be its effect on the public's willingness or reluctance to support similar "limited" military actions which will undoubtedly face our country again in the near future.

In the absence of in-depth studies, we would speculate that little reaction against the war springs directly from humanitarian or moral considerations.^{32/} Americans are not now rejecting "war," they merely wish to see this current conflict ended. The psychological supports for war in this nation run far too deeply to allow anything other than a major defeat or a major victory to alter attitudes. If the public opinion polls show anything, they indicate that this nation tolerates war and war-like conditions with extended patience and complacent fortitude, but not for indefinite periods with little visible progress.

^{32/} While 62% of respondents to the Harris poll in 1967 replied that it was wrong to kill innocent civilians, 72% supported continued bombing of North Vietnam. While 41% believed wars are morally wrong and 34% felt it was especially wrong to intervene in civil wars, 48% actually favored ground invasion of North Vietnam. Harris Newsweek survey, op. cit.

TABLE 4: SOME SURVEY CONCLUSIONS -- U.S. ATTITUDES
TOWARDS THE WAR 1966-1968

Our first finding is that public opinion is relatively orderly. The public expressed concern about the war and was relatively informed about it. The correlational analysis among scales shows patterns of consistency among the population; and many of the inconsistencies can be interpreted as more apparent than real. An overwhelming majority (88%) expressed willingness to negotiate with the Vietcong and a similar majority (81%) would oppose withdrawal of our troops "tomorrow." One can argue that many respondents are taking positions at the opposite ends of the spectrum at the same time; but this is not necessarily the case since the two policies are not in conflict. Negotiations do not necessarily imply precipitate withdrawal.

But though the preferences we found among the population were patterned, they were patterned in a more complex way than would be suggested by the summaries of public attitudes found in the standard surveys based upon one, two or three questions. Despite the consistency found, few respondents could be called "hawks" or "doves"; rather, they took more moderate positions somewhere nearer the center of the spectrum.

Sidney Verba et al, op. cit.
March, 1966

In essence, the Newsweek survey pictures a nation determined to persevere in what it believes is a grimly distasteful but altogether necessary struggle for national security. Confronted by a conflict without glory and seemingly without end, Americans seek not an old-fashioned kind of total victory, but a new kind of compromise peace.

Louis Harris survey in Newsweek
July 10, 1967, p. 22

Cautious optimism is the attitude of most Americans on the possibilities of negotiations leading to ending the war in Vietnam. Most applaud President Johnson's moves, but are convinced there is no easy road to a settlement.

National Staff of U.S. News and
World Report, May 13, 1968, p. 41